

Building a Better Tomorrow Thorough Student CEC Chapters

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Mission

The overall purpose of the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) student chapters is to advance the education of individuals with exceptionalities and to promote related educational, scientific, and charitable programs. Inspired by Catherine McCauley's, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, resolve to be "good today, but better tomorrow," the mission of the Georgian Court University (GCU) Council for Exceptional Children Student Chapter is to help build a better tomorrow by applying knowledge and expertise in the area of special education to assist individuals with disabilities. The members of the GCU CEC Chapter serve individuals with disabilities with respect, integrity, justice, and compassion while providing voluntary services and promoting educational programs that inform individuals about disabilities. The GCU CEC Chapter also cultivates future leaders in the education of youth with disabilities and encourages individuals to work with persons with disabilities and become part of the special education profession. The GCU CEC Chapter achieves this mission by sponsoring and participating in awareness programs, service activities, professional development, and fund raisers.

Awareness Programs

The purpose of Disability Awareness Programs is to raise personal and public awareness regarding the impact of a particular disability(s) – physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Each year, the GCU CEC Chapter hosts various Disability Awareness Programs including panel discussions, disability expos, and/or information sessions. During the 2003-2004 year, a student panel discussion was conducted which featured a diverse panel of GCU students with various disabilities including Spina Bifida, Vision Loss, Specific Learning Disability, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Depression, and Traumatic Brain Injury. The students on this panel shared firsthand information about their particular disability along with personal experiences and insights living with their disability with an attentive audience consisting of GCU students, faculty members, and administrators. A brief question and answer period followed each speaker. Follow up classroom discussions with audience participants indicated that the program was very meaningful, helpful, and informative. A sample of the important lessons learned include:

- the realization that we are all more alike than different
- remorse for lack of respect and insensitivity toward peers with disabilities in the past
- resolve not to be afraid to ask questions rather than avoiding individuals who have disabilities or are "different"
- greater understanding of the importance of socialization, friendship, and compassion for all individuals, particularly children with disabilities
- enhanced understanding of the justice in allowing for instructional and test accommodations
- greater insight into the necessity and challenges in making physical facilities accessible to the physically disabled
- greater awareness of the effectiveness of using students with disabilities as resources

Additionally, feedback from several student panelists who participated in the program revealed that the session was very empowering for them as well.

The GCU CEC Chapter has also organized campus-wide Disability Expos which consist of information tables and stations simulating various disabilities including vision loss, hearing loss, and physical disabilities. GCU students with disabilities are also available at certain stations to answer questions about their particular disability. One of the simulation stations includes wireless laptops booted up and connected to a PBS website that has activities that simulate Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Specific Learning Disabilities in reading, writing, and math. In an effort to ensure that the simulation stations are viewed by participants as a learning experience and not just games, the CEC Chapter officers prepare and distribute to each attendant handouts which include an orientation to the Expo and a list of reflection questions for each simulation station.

Service Activities

Service is at the heart of the GCU CEC Chapter. Chapter members seek opportunities to provide voluntary services to assist individuals with disabilities. The GCU CEC Chapter has participated in a variety of service activities including hosting recreational activities for members of the ARC of Ocean County, assisting an individual with vision loss to publish a historical work by orally reading research to her weekly for one year, and financially supporting individuals and programs consistent with the mission of CEC.

Professional Development

The GCU CEC Chapter is committed to professional development and lifelong learning. Members of the GCU CEC Chapter attend regional, statewide, and national conventions. Educational materials from these conventions are available to CEC members through the reserve section of the library at Georgian Court.

During the 2004-2005 year, the GCU CEC Chapter hosted the Second Annual New Jersey CEC Student Conference. Over 100 students and faculty advisors took advantage of this professional development opportunity with CEC student chapters attending from New Jersey City University, Rowan University, William Paterson University, Rider University, and Georgian Court University. The conference, entitled *Student CEC Best Practices: Sharing Resources*, included a keynote speaker from the New Jersey Learning Resource Center, two workshops presented by New Jersey CEC executive board members, and a college chapter share. Complimentary breakfast and lunch was provided. Throughout the conference, select attendees won give-away baskets filled with educational materials donated by local vendors. Additionally, one attendee was awarded a refurbished computer for a student with disabilities in need. The GCU CEC Chapter is scheduled to present at the Annual NJ CEC Conference, April 22, 2005.

Fundraisers

In order to financially support individuals and programs consistent with the mission of the GCU CEC Chapter, it is necessary to conduct fundraisers. The GCU CEC Chapter's biggest fundraiser is Family Day. Family Day is a campus-wide BBQ/carnival held annually where each club prepares an activity or game for children. There is no entrance fee for families; instead they purchase tickets to participate in the club games and activities. Activities the GCU CEC Chapter has offered during Family Day include spin art, hair braiding, and face painting.

Recruitment

In addition to heightened disability awareness, personal satisfaction for volunteer service, and professional development, GCU CEC Chapter members receive the publications *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, *Exceptional Children*, *CEC Today*, and the *New Jersey CEC Newsletter*, along with discounted rates at CEC events where numerous professional resources are shared. Volunteers of the GCU CEC Chapter receive Certificates of Participation for each chapter activity to include in their professional portfolio.